



Public factsheet

Meth contamination in residential dwellings, What do you need to know?

Purpose

This fact sheet provides important information on potential health risks associated with methylamphetamine (meth) contamination, and how to manage it.

Introduction

Residues of meth, also called crystal meth or ice, can occur on surfaces in residential properties from the manufacture or smoking of meth, and may pose a risk to the health of occupants. Smoke-related meth contamination of a property is much more likely than from illicit production but also less contaminating.

What is the risk?

Meth contamination will most likely not be visible. When meth is present on surfaces within a property, any person living there will potentially be exposed to those residues, which can enter the body through the skin by eating foods in contact with drug residues or by breathing it in.

Meth is an illicit drug which is classed as a stimulant and acts primarily on the central nervous system. While the effects of meth on actual drug users is well known, the effects of prolonged 'passive' exposure when other people are regularly exposed to low levels of meth, such as living in a meth

contaminated property, is less well known.

The level of risk largely depends on the level of contamination and the age of the people living in the meth contaminated house.

In some cases the contamination may be low-level, for instance with infrequent smoking of meth. However, in other cases, contamination levels and risk can be high, such as where there has been prolonged heavy use of meth and/or illicit manufacture of meth.

Children may develop respiratory or breathing difficulties, such as asthma like symptoms and persistent coughing. They may experience disrupted sleep patterns, or changes in behavior and developmental difficulties.

Pregnant women are also considered as being a high exposure risk, as the meth which enters the body can cross the placental barrier and affect the unborn child, as well as resulting in potentially serious birth complications.

Long-term passive exposure for adults in general can result in migraines, fatigue, depression and a range of other adverse health effects.



What to do about meth contamination?

You may become aware of or suspect your property is contaminated by meth in several ways. Your Local Government Authority (LGA) may write to or visit you with evidence of meth use or past operation of an illegal meth laboratory. Alternatively, you may suspect contamination due to unusual activities of tenants or the positive meth results of testing you have done or commissioned.

In the case of meth use (by smoking) the contamination will be far less than that associated with a clandestine laboratory, clan lab.

The Department of Health (DOH) and LGAs recommend that such contamination be cleaned up by an industrial/commercial cleaning contractor using a procedure intended for this purpose, normally consisting of several washes with an alkaline detergent. It would be best to document and/or obtain the cleaner's written report on the cleaning to demonstrate that it has been effective, and also for referral to the LGA.

New interim DOH Guidance is to provide more information about the cleaning process.

In most cases, soft furnishings and carpets can be cleaned through laundering or steam cleaning.

If the contamination is associated with a clan lab it will be much greater and require more thorough and professional remediation and validation afterwards.

Normally you will be directed what to do by your Local Government after the detection of clan lab activities.

The DOH guidance on the remediation of clan labs is provided at the following website:

http://ww2.health.wa.gov.au/Articles/A_E/Clandestine-drug-labs

Cleaning up of a contaminated property **before renting out or selling** is particularly important because future occupants, including vulnerable groups, will not be aware of any contamination risks.

Summary of actions to take:

1. Seek assistance from the LGA.
2. Document the clean-up process and keep it as proof, and where recommended or required, send a copy to the LGA.

Have more questions?

If you have more questions, please contact the Environmental Health Directorate at the WA Department of Health on 08 9388 4999, or an Environmental Health Officer at your Local Government.